



Sometimes you have to put up with a little rain if you want to catch a mess of fish. (Mark Rackay/ Special to the MDP)

Fish, vacations and rain

The most popular vacation time for Americans is he summer months, when the weather is nice, and the kids are out of school. Over 50% of Americans associate their vacations with the water, be it oceans, beaches, lakes or streams. There are also 50 million Americans who will go fishing this summer.

Summer and a vacation spent fishing, and all is right with the world. As a kid, I spent every waking moment fishing, or thinking about fishing. The thinking about it part got me in trouble because I usually thought about it in school.

One particular fishing vacation found my family in Eagle River, Wisconsin, for two solid weeks of non-stop fishing on the lake we were staying. We arrived late on a Sunday afternoon, with the lake calm, and the sun shining bright. That was the last time we saw the sun for two weeks.

We found ourselves in a never-ending downpour of rain, day and night, for the rest of the trip. At times, it slowed to a light drizzle, and other times, it just poured. Most days, there was no lightning, so I put on an army surplus poncho, and hit the lake.

Every 10 casts, I had to take a break to bail out the boat with an old coffee can. At the time, it seemed like the worst vacation ever. Looking back some 50 years, it still seems like the worst vacation ever. One positive side of the vacation, I caught a bunch of fish, once I figured it out.

Late summers are our rainy season here in Colorado, and many of us will take to the lakes and streams to fish, on weekends, and perhaps vacation. Rain does not have to mean “no fishing.”

Many people are immediately discouraged by the rain, but a light rain actually provides a great opportunity to catch a mess of fish.

I am sure you have heard the old myth, “Fish bite more when it is raining.” I am pretty sure this originated by some Dad trying to convince his kids to quit whining and stay out on the lake a while longer.

If you have shower conditions, such as during the summer monsoon season,



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

the most productive time to fish is right before the storm. A lowering barometric pressure can send fish into a feeding frenzy. The bite may slow during the storm, but pick right back up when it passes, and the pressures rise.

The effects of barometric pressure on fish has not been studied a great deal. It is a difficult undertaking to say the least, requiring pressurized chambers with fish tanks in them.

The standing belief of most anglers, and the researchers who have studied this some, believe fish are more active during a falling barometer because it relieves the pressure on their swim bladder, and they can move about easier. Since the falling pressure comes right before the rain starts, it makes sense the fishing is better than on high pressure.

Rain muddies the water, and disturbs the surface, decreasing visibility and making it harder for fish to see baits, especially artificials. Consider using lures that have brighter colors, and tackle that makes a little noise, such as crank baits and popping corks.

I have caught sea trout in water with zero visibility, by using a popping cork. They rise to the sound and notice the bait right below the cork.

During the late summer months, water levels drop because of summer evaporation and demands on the water sources. The water is warmer, and the oxygen levels lower, often times putting fish into lock-jaw mode.

An afternoon rainstorm can aerate the water and drop the temperature, sending the fish into activity mode, all the more reason to be on the water with rod in hand.

There is an old saying,

the brighter the day, the brighter the lure, but in my experience, this has never held true. I think it pertains more to the clarity of the water, but even so, I still find the opposite to be true. Clear water and bright days, I use dark lures.

Once the storm has passed, look for the wind-blown shoreline. The wind blowing into a shoreline during a storm will push bait fish and insects into the shoreline. This creates little pockets that can be very productive feeding grounds for fish.

When you get your tackle ready for the big weekend trip, or vacation week, include some quality rain gear. Buying a good set, versus the cheap PVC made set, will make you more comfortable, and keep you dryer inside as well, protecting you from the perspiration that inevitable occurs with PVC sets because they don’t breathe.

The only caveat to fishing in the rain, is to make sure you do it safely. Lightning is a game changer. I have fish during lightning storms and found the thunder to put an end to the fish bite.

The sound can be heard underwater, and in my experience, it shuts down the fishing. Besides, only a congenital idiot or a person with a death wish, wants to be outside, on the water, holding a graphite lightning rod in their hand, when the daggers from the sky come down.

We had an old saying when I lived in the Florida Keys, “You know what follows five days of beautiful, flat calm weather? Saturday.” The best time to go fishing is when you have time to go fishing.

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Bradley family conserves farm for future generations

By JULIA CURRIER
COLORADO WEST LAND TRUST

Preserving the picturesque North Fork Valley for future generations is at the heart of a new partnership between Colorado West Land Trust and the Bradley family.

This collaboration permanently protects approximately 55 acres of pristine fruitland in eastern Delta County, ensuring the preservation of Black Bridge Winery and Orchard Valley Farms.

The partnership helps secure important local food production, provides opportunities for the next generation, protects habitat along the North Fork of the Gunnison River, and protects scenic views in the North Fork region.

Nestled on the western flank of the West Elk Range of the Southern Rocky Mountains, Black Bridge Winery is a family owned and operated working farm which features orchards, vineyards, a winery, a farm market, and a wine-tasting room open to the public seasonally.

With its frontage on Colorado Highway 133, the property provides a scenic glimpse of the pastoral North Fork Valley against the backdrop of the iconic Mt. Lamborn and Landsend of the West Elk Mountains. A part of the West Elks American Viticulture Area (AVA), the region is recognized as one of only two AVAs in the state, underscoring its significance as a wine-grape growing region.

The journey of the Bradley family to owning their orchard is one of dedication and vision. Lee and Kathy Bradley, both passionate educators, moved to Paonia in the early 1980s to teach at the local school. Amid the coal mining boom, Lee found himself managing farms owned by a mining company.

When the mines eventually shut down, the opportunity arose for the Bradleys to purchase an orchard Lee had been managing. They invested their savings into the land, securing a bright future for their son, Ryan, who now helps run the operation alongside his wife, Kendal. With the recent addition of their son, Beau, Ryan is motivated by the desire to build a legacy for the next generation, leading to the decision to place a conservation easement on the land.

“After we closed the conservation easement



Lee, Kathy, Kendal, Beau, and Ryan Bradley stand in their orchard. (Courtesy photo/CWLT)

my dad and I both felt a real sense of pride. We felt like we had become agricultural leaders of the western slope by conserving our land,” Ryan said, “To me, the pinnacle is how you manage your land and keep it that way. It’s more important than anything else.”

This conservation easement not only ensures the preservation of open space and natural habitat on the North Fork of the Gunnison River which borders the property, but also allows the Bradley family to share their farm with others. While teaching agriculture at a nearby high school, Kendal would invite her students to learn and experience the operation firsthand. Customers are welcome to pick fruit on the land, fostering a connection to where their food comes from, and enjoy the market’s produce and wine while soaking in the serene views of the Black Bridge stretching across the North Fork Gunnison River and the West Elks range punctuating the horizon.

Reflecting on their journey, Kathy shared, “I think all that we’ve done is so worth it now. It’s just a giant payoff with all our family here,” and Kendal agreed, “Beau gets to run around in the same place his daddy grew up.”

Ryan added, “And the farm will always be here now. Even if we fail, somebody else can step in.”

This collaborative conservation effort contributes to the protection of the region’s unique landscape and cultural

heritage. The North Fork Valley is an area known for its scenic beauty, fertile agricultural lands, and thriving winemaking community. The 55-acre conservation easement joins 27 other nearby conservation easements totaling over 6,000 acres, demonstrating the community’s commitment to preserving the valley’s remaining open spaces.

“We are so thankful to collaborate with the Bradley family on this remarkable conservation project. This partnership represents our commitment to safeguarding the North Fork’s agricultural lands, precious riparian habitats, and scenic landscapes,” CWLT Conservation Manager Ilana Moir said. “This conservation easement stands as a testament to the power of community-driven conservation, and we are honored to be part of its protection.”

This conservation easement holds deep importance in an area where orchards have disappeared over the years. Preserving Black Bridge Winery not only protects a piece of history but also secures a bright future for local food production and the next generation. In a time when the connection to food sources has grown distant, the easement protects a unique opportunity for people to witness firsthand where their food comes from.

To learn more about CWLT’s work and to contribute to the organization’s efforts, visit <https://cowestlandtrust.org/>.



Overlooking orchard at Black Bridge Winery with West Elks backdrop. (Courtesy photo/CWLT)